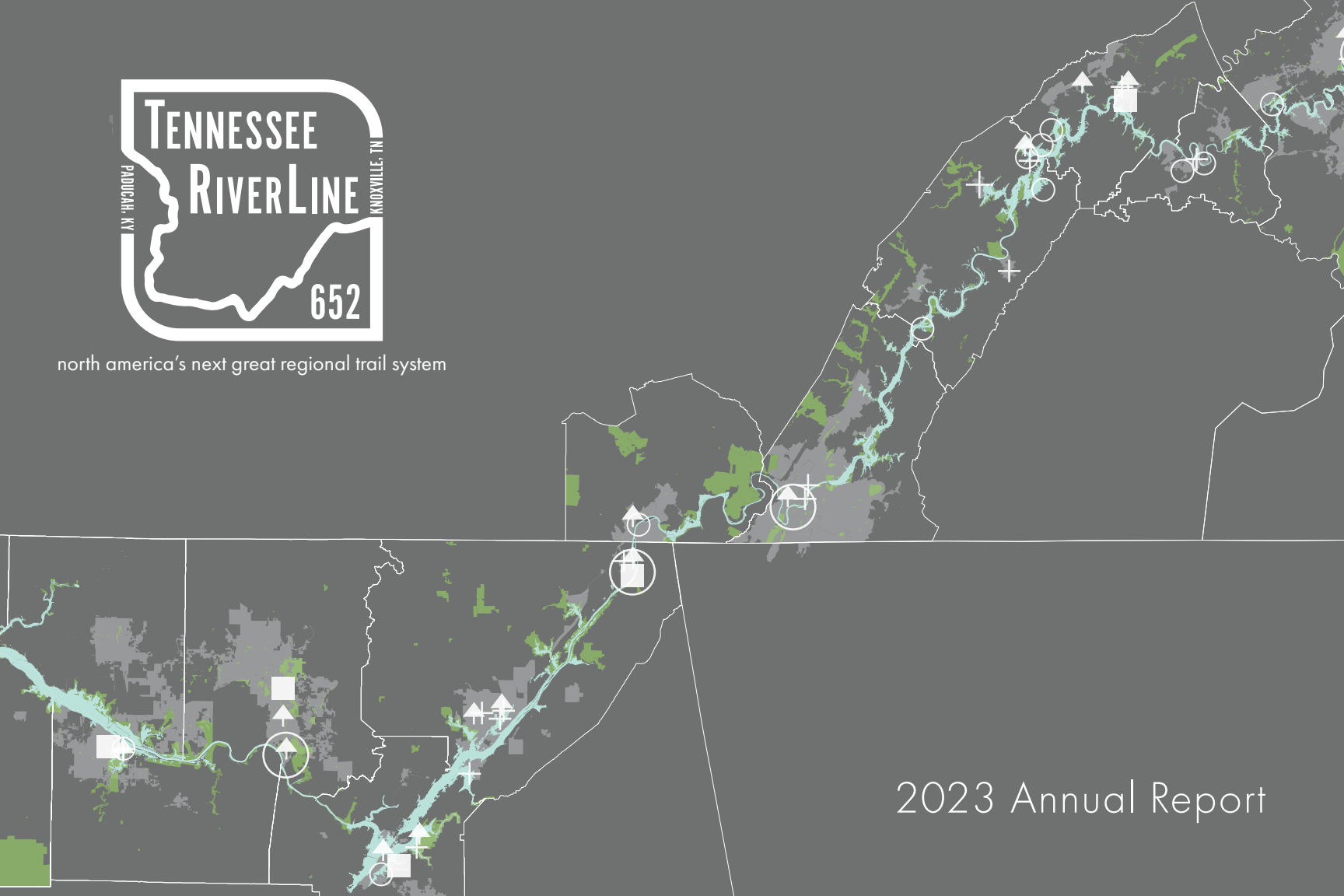




north america's next great regional trail system



2023 Annual Report

OUR ORGANIZATION

Propelled by investments from the University of Tennessee Extension and our principal partners, UT Knoxville and Tennessee Valley Authority, alongside additional funding from partners across the region and the nation, the Tennessee RiverLine's interdisciplinary team works collaboratively with diverse river communities, university faculty, staff, and students, as well as a consortium of partners. Together, we

are dedicated to advancing the realization of a shared vision and the promised benefits for future generations. Our mission involves inspiring and empowering the region, river communities, and their residents to transform the way we experience and care for our most valuable natural and cultural resource: the Tennessee River.

Tennessee RiverLine is an initiative of

with principal partners



OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose is to advance the Tennessee RiverLine vision toward implementation. We accomplish this by

FACILITATING the development of the Tennessee RiverLine concept as a multi-modal trail system and catalytic infrastructure

ENGAGING strategic partners and communities in the development process

COMMUNICATING the Tennessee RiverLine concept to targeted audiences

ESTABLISHING a sustainable organizational structure, partner participation, and sources of funding for the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership

Overlooking the Tennessee River from the P.R. Olgiate Bridge in Chattanooga, TN

OUR VISION

for North America's next great regional trail system

The Tennessee RiverLine is a continuous system of outdoor recreation experiences along the Tennessee River from Knoxville, TN, to Paducah, KY, that:



Celebrates the scenic beauty, rich diversity, and storied history of the Tennessee River and the Tennessee River Valley



Connects people and communities to each other, their river heritage, and the Tennessee River landscape and



Catalyzes new investments in economic opportunity, social health, and ecological stewardship

A kayaker enjoys a foggy early morning paddle during the fall in Knoxville, TN.

RIVER AS PARK

The 652-mile Tennessee River and its nine scenic reservoirs combine to make a continuous 470,000-acre landscape that is accessible to the public, offering opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, boating, fishing, camping, and other types of water-based recreation.

Because of this continuity and public accessibility, Tennessee RiverLine is first and foremost a water trail that offers users of all ages and skill levels the opportunity to safely paddle the storied Tennessee River for an afternoon, a day, a weekend, a week, a month, or longer.

The river's banks are also home to more than 700,000 acres of National Parks, recreation areas and wildlife refuges, state and local parks, as well as diverse cities and rural communities. Each offer their own unique stories, experiences, and river access to RiverLine users while providing opportunities to paddle, hike, bike, climb, and enjoy nature as users are immersed in the beauty of the Tennessee River landscape.

When considering the river, public landscapes, and river communities as a whole, a dynamic 1.2-million-acre park suddenly comes into focus. This landscape of opportunities and experiences connected by the river is also the vision for the Tennessee RiverLine.



Executive Director Brad Collett (back left), Tennessee State Parks staff, UT Extension, and Tennessee RiverLine staff gathers with First Lady Maria Lee and Governor Bill Lee (center) for the First Lady's Tennessee Serves initiative in Perry County, Tennessee. 4-H and Future Farmers of America students volunteered to improve an area along the Tennessee River at Mousetail Landing State Park.

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past year was another exciting year of milestones and progress made toward realizing the transformational vision for the Tennessee RiverLine.

In 2023, the power of partnerships provided thousands of area residents and visitors opportunities to experience the river landscape through recreation and stewardship programs, and nurtured growth in paddlesports leadership and recreation participation in underserved communities. Our Community Planning Initiative has excited the public imagination with local visions for North America's next great regional trail system in communities that would otherwise not have access to such creative capacity.

This year we also launched the Plan Your Journey toolkit that helps recreationists plan safe river experiences and showcases Tennessee River communities, and partnered with Ken Whiting to put our initiative, communities, and treasured river squarely in the international spotlight. These and many other mission-driven impacts have been celebrated through earned media that has reached an audience of more than 304 million viewers, yielding new and exciting opportunities to share our story with audiences across the country and around the world.

Above all else, what makes me the most proud is witnessing communities, organizations, and individuals from across the region come together for a common purpose. The leadership of UT Extension and our principal partners, UT Knoxville and TVA, and the collaborative effort of the expanded Tennessee RiverLine team, UT students, faculty, and staff, and hundreds of invested organizations and volunteers is what makes these impacts possible and what will continue to position us to achieve our shared goals in the future.

This is a mission in action, a vision made manifest, and we're just getting started. Together, we will continue exercising the power of partnerships to achieve our shared missions by promoting economic development and entrepreneurship, improving quality of life and public health, inspiring stewardship of natural and cultural resources, and enhancing equity of access to river spaces and experiences in Tennessee River communities.

To these ends, 2024 will be another year of mission-driven programs, investments, and growth. We are grateful to count you among our partners, and we look forward to the ongoing journey we share as a part of North America's next great regional trail system.

Sincerely,

Brad Collett
Executive Director, Tennessee RiverLine
Professor, UT Department of Plant Sciences
Faculty, UT School of Landscape Architecture

YEAR AT A GLANCE

TENNESSEE RIVER TOWNS

86 ANIMATION & STEWARDSHIP EVENTS hosted by 20 enrolled communities, made possible by

251 LOCAL LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS who volunteered to offer

4,550 PARTICIPANTS new river experiences,

100 RIVER MILES paddled &

27,250 LBS OF LITTER removed.

4 COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS totaling **\$29,600**

TENNESSEE RIVERLINE 652 TO YOU

6 COMMUNITIES engaged,

308 COMMUNITY LEADERS & RESIDENTS participated,

36 COMMUNITY EVENTS

570 MARKERS placed &

1,500 MILES traveled

COMMUNITY Planning Initiative

Community Planning Initiative Phase Two Complete!

9 COMMUNITIES engaged,

1,918 SURVEYS received,

9 PRIORITY PLACEMAKING PROJECTS designed,

280 EXHIBIT attendees, &

3,100 MILES traveled

PLAN YOUR Journey

INTERACTIVE WEB MAP LAUNCHED

5 TRIP ITINERARIES developed

750 RIVER AMENITIES mapped

2,800 WEB MAP views

44k REACHED through social campaign

492k FACEBOOK, X, & INSTAGRAM reach

92% more POSTS **12%** GROWTH over 2023

41% more SUBSCRIBERS

14% more social engagement **20%** more social impressions **49%** more comments & replies

21 INVITED PRESENTATIONS 2 at national conferences

\$11.2 million in earned MEDIA VALUE

FACING WAVES

3.5 million VIEWERS

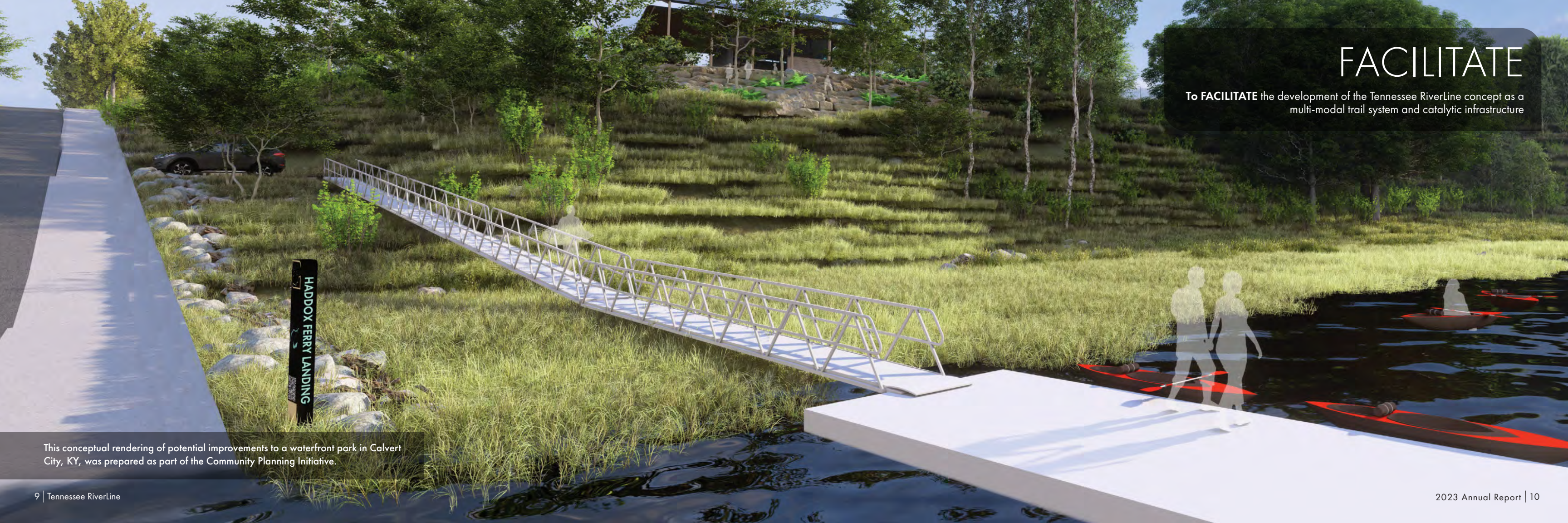
119 AIRINGS

2 COUNTRIES reached

3 NATIONAL NETWORKS

89.3K PADDLE TALES viewers

THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS, WE ARE BRINGING THE TENNESSEE RIVERLINE TO LIFE



FACILITATE

To **FACILITATE** the development of the Tennessee RiverLine concept as a multi-modal trail system and catalytic infrastructure

This conceptual rendering of potential improvements to a waterfront park in Calvert City, KY, was prepared as part of the Community Planning Initiative.

TENNESSEE RIVERLINE 652 TO YOU

Throughout 2023, we conducted the 652 to YOU public engagement program with new Tennessee RiverTowns Program enrollees. 652 to YOU is an opportunity for community leaders and residents to provide feedback about existing recreation experiences and infrastructure on or along the river, and share ideas for their improvement and expansion by participating in a series of interactive events and activities facilitated by our team.

At the conclusion of each 652 to YOU program, recommendations for how each community can make progress toward their aspirations related to the Tennessee RiverLine vision will be shared, and a list of potential priority projects will be identified based on each community's shared vision for their section of the Tennessee RiverLine. These projects could include new riverfront parks, campsites and access points, connective trails and greenways, and other asset-based infrastructure investments.

Communities that kicked off the 652 to YOU program in 2023:

- Chattanooga, TN
- Jackson County, AL
- Loudon County, TN
- Meigs County, TN
- Perry County, TN
- Spring City, TN

Community Planning Initiative

Over the past two years, we conducted the Community Planning Initiative (CPI) in eligible communities enrolled in the Tennessee RiverTowns Program. This two-phase initiative concluded in the Fall of 2023, with the development of conceptual design documents for priority placemaking projects selected by local leadership as well as the facilitation of open house exhibits in each of the participating communities.

These open houses and conceptual designs are a culmination of extensive and collaborative efforts between the Tennessee RiverLine, enrolled Tennessee RiverTowns communities, and our partners at UT Knoxville, 3M, USDA Rural Development, and TVA. Community engagement and conceptual design through CPI marks an important milestone in achieving our vision and River as Park concept locally and regionally.

Communities that participated in CPI:

- Bridgeport, AL
- Calvert City, KY
- Clifton, TN
- Decatur, AL
- Guntersville, AL
- Hardin County, TN
- Huntsville, AL
- Roane County, TN
- The Shoals, AL

With conceptual design documents now developed for each of these participating communities' priority placemaking projects, the next step is to help build public support for these projects and make progress toward their implementation.

CPI was made possible by funding through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge, as well as through the generous support of 3M Decatur with funds from the 3M Foundation, and our principal partners, UT Knoxville and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).



Participants at NATR Fest in Decatur, AL, review conceptual plans for Rhodes Ferry Park at the Tennessee RiverLine's Community Planning Initiative exhibit.



“Plan Your Journey” is a collection of new resources to help paddlers, boaters, anglers, and other river users plan safe and enriching Tennessee River experiences. The “Plan Your Journey” trip planning tools include an interactive web map detailing the locations and additional information about boat launches, public lands, campgrounds, outfitters, marinas, and more, along with suggested paddling trip itineraries in Tennessee River communities.

These tools have been developed to simplify the trip planning process for river users of all experience levels. For new or beginning paddlers, the “Plan Your Journey” tools build confidence in planning river experiences by consolidating hard-to-find information into a single source, while also providing information about river safety, gear lists, resource stewardship practices, and basic paddling skills.

Experienced users of the Tennessee River may discover new amenities and ideas for new paddling routes or overnight experiences by exploring the interactive web map. Boaters, anglers, and other river recreationists will also find useful information on the map about river access areas and marinas when planning their own river experiences. All mapped amenities are conveniently located within a 15-minute drive from the river’s edge, making them easily accessible to Tennessee RiverLine users.



The “Plan Your Journey” toolkit provides planning resources, suggested itineraries, and safety information to simplify the planning process for river users of all experience levels.



A conceptual site plan for Ross Creek Park in Clifton, TN, was developed through the Community Planning Initiative.

New Investments

Harnessing the momentum cultivated over the past several years through river recreation and stewardship initiatives, visions for reanimated river spaces and enhanced experiences are capturing the public’s imagination throughout the region.

The Community Planning Initiative and 652 to YOU have given rise to conceptual designs for new boat launch areas, riverfront parks, trails, campgrounds, and other amenities. Noteworthy progress is also being achieved by allied initiatives like the Singing River Trail (AL) and Bill Dance Signature Lakes (TN). Together with community-driven planning and design efforts, the stage is being set for substantial investments in the quality of life within river communities in the foreseeable future.

A standout example is South Pittsburg’s dedication to building a 16-acre riverfront park, complemented by a 5.5-mile network of connecting trails and greenways. Grant applications exceeding \$12 million were submitted for the necessary funds to implement the initial phases of this project in 2023. Abundant funding opportunities from state and federal sources for infrastructure implementation eagerly await Tennessee RiverTowns communities actively investing in their futures, guided by the support of our planning, design, and advancement teams.



4-H students from across Tennessee enhance their paddling skills and knowledge of water safety during a day of paddling with the Tennessee RiverLine team at their 100th 4-H Roundup, exploring the river habitat in downtown Knoxville, TN.

ENGAGE

To ENGAGE strategic partners and communities in the development process



The Tennessee RiverTowns program utilizes trail development and outdoor recreation as platforms for collaboration between enrolled communities and Tennessee RiverLine staff to increase benefits from economic development, public health, equitable access to river experiences, and resource stewardship.

In 2023, community partners in the program organized 86 animation events. These events, tailored to outdoor recreation and stewardship, offered a commendable 14,202 participants throughout the Tennessee River Valley with new river experiences. Notably, six Tennessee RiverTowns communities initiated their involvement through active participation in 652 to YOU events, while nine communities collaborated closely with our Planning and Design Team in the creation of innovative conceptual designs for new recreation amenities. This collaborative effort underscores the commitment of Tennessee RiverTowns communities to enhancing the well-being and vibrancy of communities along the Tennessee River.

Learn more about the program at tnriverline.org/rivertowns.

Looking Ahead to 2024

In 2024, three new communities are enrolling into the Tennessee RiverTowns Program: Calloway County, KY, Lawrence County, AL, and Dayton, TN. Those communities will begin their journey within the program, while other communities look ahead to Stage 2 of the Tennessee RiverTowns Program and trail development through the conceptual design process, moving closer to infrastructure implementation. Jennifer Webster and Nolan Wildfire joined our Programs Team at the end of 2023 as Program Managers to increase support for Tennessee RiverTowns enrollees, and we look forward to their impact and expertise shaping the growth of our programs!

Volunteerism

The effectiveness of the Tennessee RiverTowns Program, much like many of our endeavors, hinges on the dedication of volunteers who generously contribute their time and effort to the initiative. In 2023, more than 251 community members participated as volunteer members of their communities' Local Leadership Teams. In 2024, our forward-looking strategy includes enhancing the support system for these invaluable individuals. We are committed to providing expanded technical assistance, tools, and resources, fostering an environment that ensures the continued success of volunteers within our enrolled communities.

"The Tennessee RiverLine has given us the opportunity to bring a diverse group of people from across Roane County, and our entire region, together in a positive way. It has given us the ability to share our love of being on the water with members of our community who otherwise may never have the opportunity and provided our community a shared vision to improve our connection to this wonderful river."

- David Bolling, City Manager, Kingston, TN

The J.E.D.I. Path

Paddlesports Leadership Academy: The Paddlesports Leadership Academy (PLA) is a program created by Gerry Seavo James, Principal of The Outdoor Recreation Design Lab and Founder of Explore Kentucky, to train and mentor individuals from communities typically underserved by outdoor recreation as leaders in paddlesports. In 2023, we partnered with Gerry and Anna Levesque with Mind Body Paddle to facilitate the PLA for the second year. Participants learned multi-disciplinary paddling fundamentals, technique, risk management fundamentals, and outdoor leadership skills over the course of four days. The program included eight participants from around the region, including individuals from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama representing organizations including Outdoor Afro, Black Kids Adventures, Black Women Who, Eastern Kentucky University, Centro Hispano de East TN, and the Office of Multicultural Student Life at UT Knoxville. Special instruction from previous graduates included Shawanna Kendrick, founder of Hiking Healing and Outdoors, and NaQuaina Moore, Assistant Director for UT Knoxville's Multicultural Student Life.

Grant Funding: In 2023, \$29,600 in grant funds were awarded to communities and organizational partners to support programming that fosters inclusive engagement with the Tennessee River landscape, enables diverse participation in recreation experiences, and establishes pride in and ownership of river spaces by historically underserved populations. Funding was awarded to three communities enrolled in the Tennessee RiverTowns Program, Bridgeport, AL, Chattanooga, TN, and Hardin County, TN, as well as one organizational partner, Black Kids Adventures.

The River City Company in Chattanooga, TN, partnered with The H2O Life and WaterWays to provide a series of accessible and educational events for residents of all ages. In partnership with Russell Cave National Monument and Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area, The 18th Alabama Volunteer

Regiment of Civil War Reenactors, North Alabama Canoe and Kayak, and Bridgeport's Local Leadership Team hosted a day of paddling and historical interpretation for the students of Bridgeport Middle School. Hardin County leadership partnered with Tennessee State Parks, Friends of Pickwick Landing State Park, The Hardin County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tennessee River Museum, and the local 4-H chapter to provide underprivileged youth with the opportunity to enjoy water recreation through the educational format of the 4-H program. The Black Kids Adventures organizational grant helped to support their continued mission of inspiring black families to engage and enjoy outdoor recreation experiences together through intergenerational programming.



The Paddlesports Leadership Academy is a program to grow diverse representation in outdoor recreation leadership. Eight participants developed paddling and outdoor leadership skills during four days of training.

Partnership Paddle

In September, our annual Partnership Paddle convened partners from diverse regions in South Pittsburg, TN, the 2022 Community Partner of the Year. Designed as a platform for cultivating collaborative relationships, the event drew the participation of 38 individuals. The program featured a warm welcome reception and a scenic paddle on the Tennessee River, spanning from South Pittsburg, TN, to Bridgeport, AL—a signature route for the community. This gathering was made possible through a collaborative effort with Lodge Cast Iron, SPARQ, and Walker Henley. It served as a momentous occasion to spotlight the South Pittsburg community and celebrate significant milestones in advancing our shared initiatives.



Living Shoreline Research

Upholding the Tennessee RiverLine's commitment to inspire new generations of stewards invested in the care of our treasured river, a partnership was formed with UT's One Health Initiative to fund research that will inform shoreline management practices across the region. This investment in the land grant mission has led to multidisciplinary teams of students, staff, and faculty exploring living shoreline solutions for bank erosion control and enhanced wildlife habitat. Additionally, they are studying the potential of floating wetlands and public art to reduce sedimentation and foster engagement in water quality issues among greenway users.



Partners in the Classroom

During the fall semester, graduate students from the UT College of Communication & Information's Tombras School of Advertising and Public Relations undertook a comprehensive brand audit for the Tennessee RiverLine. This engagement is a testament to our commitment to excellence and continuous improvement, and to innovate UT's land grant mission through experiential learning and engaged scholarship.

Focused on Knoxville, TN, the students conducted localized research to gauge the existing understanding and perceptions of the Tennessee RiverLine brand. Their investigation delved into the motivations of our diverse audiences, seeking to understand how we can better connect with them. The result was a detailed presentation that not only validated our current brand plans but also introduced fresh ideas and innovative strategies that will inform the evolution of communication and marketing plans.

"The Tombras School of Advertising and Public Relations prioritizes service-learning, and the opportunity to partner with an impactful and important initiative like the Tennessee RiverLine was a rich learning experience at the heart of our mission as a land-grant University. Students conducted research with river users and non-users to generate valuable insights about the powerful work the RiverLine is doing. They were passionate about their capstone final projects, and we are all grateful for the opportunity to work with and learn from the RiverLine's incredible leadership."

- Beth Foster, Professor & Director, Tombras School of Advertising and Public Relations



UT College of Communication & Information students present the results of their Tennessee RiverLine brand audit study.

COMMUNICATE

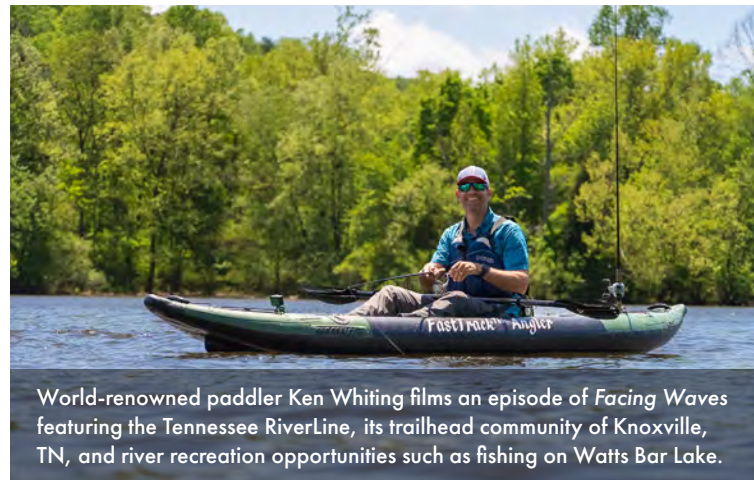
To **COMMUNICATE** the Tennessee RiverLine concept to targeted audiences

Brad Collett presents at PechaKucha Night Knoxville, challenging the audience to embrace the responsibility of leading the region as Tennessee RiverLine's trailhead community.

Image: Pecha Kucha Knoxville

Facing Waves

We worked with Heliconia Productions to produce an episode of *Facing Waves* featuring the Tennessee RiverLine, with an emphasis on Knoxville as the trailhead community. *Facing Waves* is an inspiring adventure travel TV series that follows world-renowned paddler and author, Ken Whiting, as he discovers the cultures, landscapes, and paddling adventures that surround the world's most amazing adventure travel destinations. Whiting has an avid following of paddling enthusiasts, so the audience is highly targeted and in alignment with our core user audience. A full-length half-hour episode was produced and began airing on national broadcast TV through Bally Sports and Outside TV in September. It has had 119 airings reaching 3.54M viewers. Shorter-form episodes called *Paddle Tales* were produced for distribution on YouTube. This content is evergreen and will remain on YouTube with widespread access and has already gained 89.3k viewers.



World-renowned paddler Ken Whiting films an episode of *Facing Waves* featuring the Tennessee RiverLine, its trailhead community of Knoxville, TN, and river recreation opportunities such as fishing on Watts Bar Lake.

Events

Tennessee RiverTowns events, both recreation and stewardship activities, serve as dual-purpose strategies. They not only educate and engage attendees as advocates for the Tennessee RiverLine vision but also provide opportunities for recreation, celebrating the river's heritage, and fostering its health. In the 86 official Tennessee RiverTowns events this year, with over 14,000 participants, many experienced their first introduction to the Tennessee RiverLine, while all gained insights into their community's efforts to transform its relationship with the river. Additionally, our staff disseminated information about the initiative at prominent regional and national events, such as UTIA's Ag Day and the Head of the Hooch Regatta in Chattanooga, TN. These two events alone were attended by over 15,000 alumni and spectators from across the country.



A rowing team carries their boat to the river at the Head of the Hooch regatta in Chattanooga, TN.

Presentations

In 2023, Tennessee RiverLine staff and partners delivered presentations at various events, including the Tennessee Greenways and Trails Forum in Spencer, TN, the Ohio River Way Summit in Madison, IN, and Leadership Jackson's graduation in Scottsboro, AL. Across 21 public presentations, attended by approximately 1,100 people, the focus was on highlighting the partners and partnerships driving the Tennessee RiverLine. The presentations not only acknowledged opportunities for future growth but also shared valuable insights gained on the journey towards establishing North America's next great regional trail system.

Stories Worth Telling

Our earned media efforts have resonated with over 304 million viewers, with a media value exceeding \$11.2 million. It is exciting to see our message amplified far and wide. The top tracking stories of the year included the announcement of the Tennessee RiverLine becoming an initiative of the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture which received significant pickup by national news outlets and a UTIA News story featuring the CONNECT South Pittsburg Framework Plan for South Pittsburg, TN, that was nationally broadcast on RFD-TV.



Brad Collett is interviewed about the importance of river health and stewardship to the Tennessee RiverLine mission.



The 2023 Partnership Paddle unites key contributors, including Local Leadership Team volunteers, principal partners, and supporting organizations, as they embark on the second annual journey from South Pittsburg, Tennessee, to Bridgeport, Alabama, symbolizing the collaborative effort in bringing our vision to life.

ESTABLISH

To **ESTABLISH** a sustainable organizational structure, partner participation, and sources of funding for the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership

Brad Collett Appointed Tennessee RiverLine's First Executive Director

After leading the Tennessee RiverLine initiative for seven years as part of his teaching and research activity as a UT faculty member, Brad Collett was appointed Executive Director of the Tennessee RiverLine by UT Extension. This milestone allows for Brad's full-time leadership, enhancing focus on organizational and partnership development. This appointment accelerates the realization of the Tennessee RiverLine vision, benefiting future generations. With alignment to UT's land grant mission in outreach and economic development, the Tennessee RiverLine is part of UT Extension, contributing to a century-old legacy of improving the quality of life in Tennessee and the broader Tennessee River Valley.

"The appointment of Brad Collett as Executive Director of the Tennessee RiverLine is a testament to his exemplary leadership of the initiative these past many years, and UT Extension's commitment to the land grant mission. UT Extension strives to help Tennesseans thrive through impactful programs that benefit agriculture, natural resources, families, youth development, and communities. The Tennessee RiverLine exemplifies this mission by not only connecting communities along the river but also by actively enhancing the quality of life for all."

-Ashley Stokes, Dean of UT Extension



Staff Growth

Thanks to the generous support of UTIA and UT Extension, as well as our principal partners, UT Knoxville and TVA, 2023 was a year of unprecedented growth for the Tennessee RiverLine team, which added essential capacity in the areas of Communications and Marketing, Planning and Design, and Programming. Building on the foundation set by our existing team, the additions of professionals in these areas enabled many of the successes and mission-driven impacts included in this report and will help accelerate the realization of the vision for North America's next great regional trail system.

Meet the team! Visit tnriverline.org/tennessee-riverline-staff

Funding Partners

Over the last year, our principal partners, UT Knoxville and TVA, maintained their investment in the initiative, enabling our staff growth and continued support of Tennessee RiverTowns Program enrollees as they progress towards official Tennessee RiverTown designation. In addition, the Tennessee Department of Health joined other public agencies and corporate partners as a funder of 652 to YOU, one of the Tennessee RiverLine's signature community engagement and planning programs, through a \$50,000 Healthy Built Environment grant. Recognizing the link between the built environment and health, the Tennessee Department of Health supports the creation of built environments that protect, promote, and improve the health and prosperity of all Tennesseans. Finally, partners such as the REI Cooperative Action Fund, BoardSafe Docks, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, and others provided crucial support for signature programs and events such as the Tennessee RiverLine Summit and Paddlesports Leadership Academy.





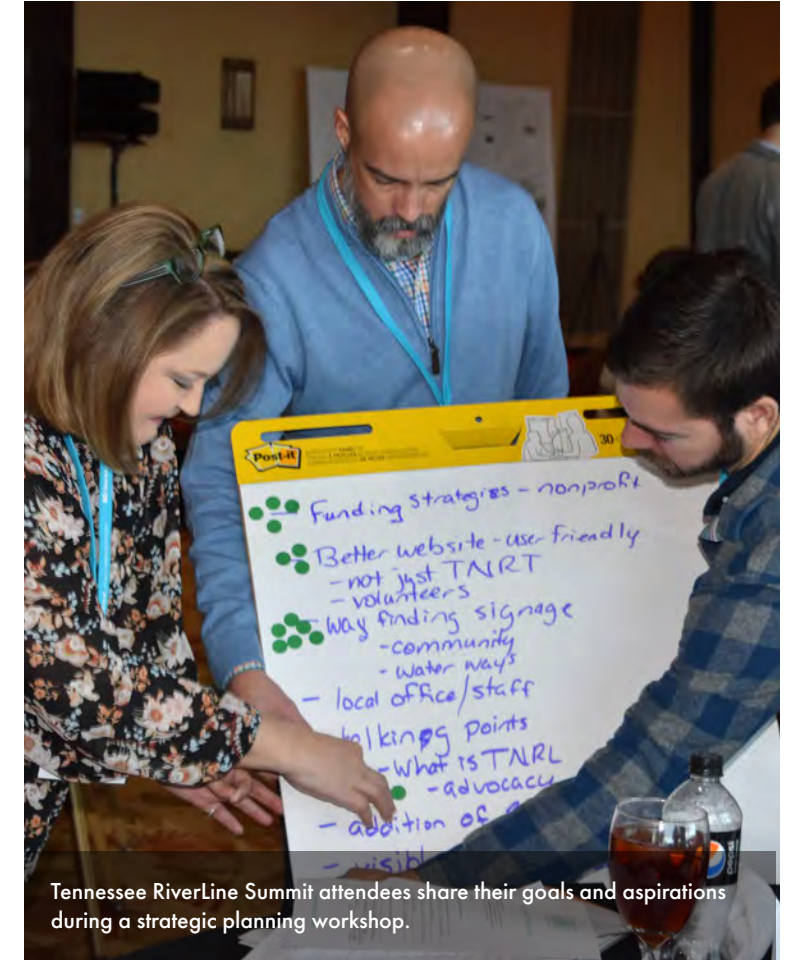
Over 100 attendees from across the region participate in the 2023 Tennessee RiverLine Summit in Guntersville, AL, attending informational sessions, networking events, and an excursion to Cathedral Caverns.

Tennessee RiverLine Summit

For the first time since 2020, partners from river communities and organizations across the country convened in person for the 2023 Tennessee RiverLine Summit at Lake Guntersville State Park in Guntersville, AL. Commanding views over the river below set the stage for two and a half days of engaging and informative sessions for the more than 100 attendees. Supported by the first-ever presenting sponsor, BoardSafe Docks, Summit highlights included a keynote address by Carol Colleta from the Memphis River Parks Partnership, presentations by community partners sharing ideas and best practices, announcements of 2022 awards recipients, and excursions to Cathedral Caverns and Guntersville's City Harbor. Attendees also helped set the initiative's trajectory for the future through an engaging strategic planning workshop.

A Roadmap for the Future

During the Tennessee RiverLine Summit, a pivotal workshop engaged attendees in assessing the initiative's current strengths, opportunities for improvement, and future priorities. The results of this session will serve as the groundwork for a formal strategic planning process scheduled for 2024. Led by Alta Planning + Design and a nationally recognized team of experts, this process will entail extensive listening, stakeholder engagement, and reflection to define goals and strategic priorities. The aim is to sustainably advance our mission while upholding guiding principles over the next three years.



Tennessee RiverLine Summit attendees share their goals and aspirations during a strategic planning workshop.



GET INVOLVED

Residents and visitors of all ages are welcomed to **GET INVOLVED** as active participants in the development of the Tennessee RiverLine in their communities and as active stewards of the Tennessee River.

Lt. Colonel John M. Walker and a group of JR ROTC volunteers help load kayaks after a paddling event in Bridgeport, AL. Bridgeport was the recipient of a 2023 DEI Community Impact Grant from Tennessee RiverLine to support an event focused on paddling, advocacy, and historical interpretation for Bridgeport Middle School.



4th and 5th grade 4-H students in Hardin County, TN, participate in River Rangers Day Camp at Pickwick Landing State Park, picking up new outdoor skills and learning about river stewardship.

Donate

Your support for the Tennessee RiverLine makes a direct impact on our community outreach and programming efforts. This includes crucial initiatives like the Tennessee RiverTowns Program and the Paddlesports Leadership Academy. Your contribution plays a vital role in advancing the shared vision for North America's next great regional trail system, supporting essential infrastructure projects, and ensuring access to free paddling events with equipment for those who do not own their own.

Visit tnriverline.org/donate to make a donation through our fiscal agent, UT Foundation.

Purchase Tennessee RiverLine Merchandise

The official gear of the Tennessee RiverLine is available for purchase in our online store and at the Student Union VolShop on the UT Knoxville campus. Featuring Columbia apparel and Yeti and Nalgene drinkware, our merchandise is a perfect companion for your outdoor adventures.

Visit tnriverline.org/store to shop online.

Participate in an Event

Join in on one of the many events happening along all 652 miles of the Tennessee RiverLine. Follow our social platforms or visit tnriverline.org/events to stay up to date on opportunities to paddle, hike, or assist clean up!



A volunteer collects trash from First Creek in Knoxville, TN, during a clean-up event hosted in partnership with UT's One Health Initiative.

Plan Your Journey

Whether you are planning the hero's journey of 652 miles, a weekend adventure, or a single-day excursion, our interactive planning map will help you locate important locations such as boat launches, carry-ins, campgrounds, parks, and outfitters. In addition, we have recommended itineraries of varying lengths, packing lists, safety resources, and other helpful trip-planning tools.

Visit tnriverline.com/planyourjourney to plan your next adventure.

Volunteer with Your Local Leadership Team

Are you a resident of one of the Tennessee RiverTowns Program communities? Do you want to volunteer to develop the Tennessee RiverLine in your area? Each community has a Local Leadership Team that is responsible for advocating, marketing, and developing the Tennessee RiverLine. If you are interested in joining the journey, email info@tnriverline.org and we will connect you with the Local Leadership Team in your community.



AWARDS

The Tennessee RiverLine is powered by partnerships. It stands as a testament that we — as a region, as a consortium of committed organizations, and communities and as a network of dedicated individuals — can achieve something together that none of us could accomplish alone. The Tennessee RiverLine Awards recognizes those who have best exemplified these ideals in 2022.

The Spring City Local Leadership Team, Responsible Stewardship, Arrowhead Resort, and the Tennessee RiverLine collect 2 tons of trash from the Tennessee River during a clean-up in Spring City, TN. Spring City's commitment to stewardship of the river is rooted in a desire to inspire respect for the river across generations.

Image: Responsible Stewardship, Inc.

Individual Partner of the Year: *Carrie Crawford*

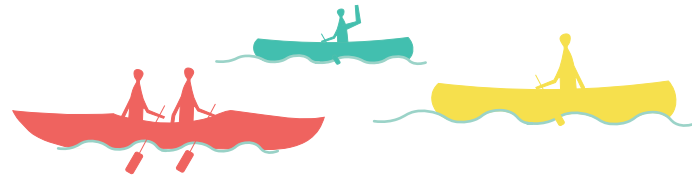
As leader of The Shoals Local Leadership Team, Carrie has worked tirelessly to offer enriching river experiences to members of her community. She has helped organize recreation and stewardship events that enabled hundreds of participants to safely get out on the water, all the while putting our guiding principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into action. Since 2019, Carrie has consistently embraced the 652 to YOU program and demonstrated her commitment by actively supporting mobility planning in Colbert County, AL, overseeing the development of interpretive trails in Florence, AL, and contributing to visionary design concepts for both the historic railroad bridge and Patton Island. By doing so, Carrie is empowering local residents and leaders, giving them a voice in shaping the future of The Shoal's connection with the river. Her efforts are cultivating a crucial level of community buy-in that will be pivotal in bringing to fruition the visionary project goals inspired

Community Partner of the Year: *Hardin County, TN*

Hardin County's embrace of the Tennessee RiverLine vision and comprehensive engagement across all aspects of the Tennessee RiverTowns Program has been particularly inspiring. The integration of the area's natural heritage and unique histories into its river animation and stewardship program demonstrates creativity and initiative to the benefit of event participants. Their commitment to partnerships with Pickwick Landing State Park, the Tennessee River Museum, UT Extension, and others make these innovative programs possible. Through collaboration with neighboring Tennessee RiverTowns communities, Hardin County emphasizes the mutual benefits that result from their leadership.

Organizational Partner of the Year: *UT Extension*

UT Extension's strategic investment has enabled the Tennessee RiverLine to grow its multi-disciplinary team of professionals that delivers capacity to communities across the region to which they would otherwise not have access. Extension's investment has also enabled the delivery of meaningful programs that educate, inspire, and overcome barriers to river spaces and experiences. Each has set a foundation for new investments in river communities that will catalyze economic development, quality of life, and resource stewardship while accelerating the growth of the region's outdoor recreation economy. Staff from UT Extension County Offices have provided essential and stable leadership for the Tennessee RiverTowns Program where community participation may otherwise not be possible, most notably in Perry County. In Hardin County, UT Extension office is helping offer enriching educational programs for 4-H students, such as their River Rangers program, in partnership with Pickwick Landing State Park. During the summer, we partnered with UT Extension to offer fifty 4-H students and leaders the opportunity to kayak the Tennessee River during the centennial 4-H Roundup in Knoxville.



Event of the Year: *Chatt Town Cool Down*

This event exemplified many of the Tennessee RiverLine's guiding principles through its creative and comprehensive schedule of activities. Never before has a Tennessee RiverTowns community afforded so many attendees of a range of ages, backgrounds, and experience levels such an array of diverse and inclusive river experiences in a single event. Among the event's dozens of on and off-water activities, the H2O Life Black Women Paddle helped build camaraderie and solidarity while overcoming barriers for many first-time paddlers. The Paddle Down offered more experienced paddlers the opportunity to enjoy the Tennessee River with the city landscape as the backdrop. Integrating Chattanooga's 652 to YOU program into the event creatively engaged the community, giving attendees a voice in city recreation development and raising awareness of the broader Tennessee RiverLine initiative. The entire event was made possible by Chattanooga's Local Leadership Team, Outdoor Chattanooga, and the power of partnerships.



Children cool off on the bubble slide at Chatt Town Cool Down.

J.E.D.I. Path Award: *Shawanna Kendrick*

After meeting Shawanna Kendrick at the inaugural Paddlesports Leadership Academy, it became clear that outdoor spaces were her avenue for personal growth and healing. In 2023, exceeding Tennessee RiverTowns Program expectations, she collaborated with River City Company and Waterways in Chattanooga to organize inclusive events for all ages through the Tennessee RiverLine DEI Community Impact Grant. Shawanna's development of the Woman on Water Program, aimed at creating confident women of color as outdoor recreation ambassadors, showcased her leadership growth. From instructing at the 2023 Paddlesports Leadership Academy to leading the first-ever flat-water paddling group at Women's Paddlefest, her grace and inclusive leadership are appreciated by colleagues and friends alike.

Powered by Partnerships Award: *NATR*

The Powered by Partnership concept comes to life through NATR's ingenuity and initiative, driving efforts in North Alabama to enhance equitable access to outdoor recreation spaces and experiences. NATR's dedication to this shared mission took center stage at the 2023 NATR Fest, rapidly becoming a hallmark event on North Alabama's outdoor recreation calendar. Guided by the leadership of Alabama Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys RC&D, and supported by numerous partners, NATR Fest provides residents with an opportunity to explore and engage in the region's extraordinary outdoor recreation experiences. It serves not only as an avenue for individuals to learn and participate but also as a platform for allied recreation initiatives to convene, exchange successes, and collaboratively advance shared missions and priorities.

Legacy Awards: Susan Jones, Jennifer Moore, and, Madeleine Williamson

The Legacy Award recognizes individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the Tennessee RiverLine and demonstrated commitment to its guiding principles over a sustained period of time. This year, we honor Susan Jones, Jennifer Moore, and Madeleine Williamson with Legacy Awards.

Since **Susan Jones** first engaged with the Tennessee RiverLine in 2019, she has played a crucial role in effectively communicating the mission and vision of the initiative. As we transitioned from vision awareness to implementing the Tennessee RiverTowns Program, Susan consistently provided valuable insight and welcomed feedback on communication strategies and organizational goals. Susan's contributions were instrumental in navigating TVA's leadership structure to secure timely quotes, planning signature events, and crafting announcements that celebrated collective impact and achievement. Her efforts also played a key role in establishing a unified voice that amplifies the initiative's stories across the region and globally.

As a regular convener of Tennessee RiverTowns community partners in North Alabama, **Jennifer Moore** actively pursued the realization of the Tennessee RiverLine vision for Huntsville and Madison County. Jennifer consistently fostered collaboration with fellow North Alabama communities, introducing Tennessee RiverTowns Program convenings after quarterly Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association meetings. Advocating at local, state, and community levels, she played a key role in establishing our relationship with the Alabama Tourism Department. Serving on the Huntsville Local Leadership Team, Jennifer's exemplary dedication and leadership during challenging times ensured the program's continuity and engagement. She also secured substantial contributions for regional destination marketing efforts and dedicated personnel for the Huntsville/Madison County Convention and Visitors Bureau to meet Tennessee RiverTowns Program requirements.

Madeleine Williamson played a pivotal role during a critical growth phase for our team. Stepping in when administrative support was limited, Madeleine led operational initiatives, researching and implementing valuable tools and procedures for the organization. Her reliability and attention to detail were evident in tasks ranging from event preparation to financial reconciliation and document editing. Madeleine tackled essential responsibilities, ensuring updated inventory and timely expense reports. She organized and streamlined processes, helping us transition from a vision to a tangible organization. This had substantial impacts on our community partners and the region.

Excellence in Stewardship: Spring City, TN

The Tennessee RiverTowns Program calls on communities to recognize their shared responsibility to steward the region's most valuable natural and cultural resource through stewardship events. Each community can design stewardship experiences that are place-based and partner-driven, enabling participants to learn about and engage with a community's unique stewardship priorities. Spring City's continued partnership with Arrowhead Resort and Responsible Stewardship to provide numerous clean-up opportunities for the community is an exemplary and innovative demonstration of this intention. Their efforts champion the community's love for the Tennessee River, a desire to conserve it for future generations, and the commitment to create new and younger generations of stewards.



Excellence in Recreation: Bridgeport, TN

Bridgeport's community efforts to engage youth in paddlesports activities this year have demonstrated a commitment to expanding river users in the area. The initiatives showcase that the Tennessee River is an accessible recreation amenity that improves the quality of life and public health in Bridgeport. As recipients of the DEI Community Impact Grant, the Local Leadership Team in Bridgeport dedicated time and effort to implementing essential risk management and participant safety measures. This focused effort aimed to make rivers accessible to middle school students who lack their own paddling equipment or do not have easy access to such river experiences. Thanks to their hard work, the events empowered youth to feel welcomed and confident when accessing river spaces and experiences.

Extra Mile Awards

In 2023, 251 volunteer members of 20 Tennessee RiverTowns Local Leadership Teams organized river animation and stewardship events, advocacy efforts, and other initiatives to raise awareness of the Tennessee RiverLine vision and facilitate community engagement in its realization.

As a recognition of outstanding effort and leadership, each Local Leadership Team in every community had the chance to nominate a team member for the Extra Mile Award. The recipients of the 2023 Extra Mile Awards are:

- Benton County, TN *Josh Justice*
- Bridgeport, AL *Lieutenant Colonel John M. Walker*
- Calvert City, KY *Gene Colburn*
- Chattanooga, TN *Shawanna Kendrick*
- Clifton, TN *Doug Kibby*
- Decatur, AL *Dr. Bill Sims*
- Guntersville, AL *Katy Norton*
- Hardin County, TN *Brandon Weber*
- Huntsville, AL *Bob Stagg*
- Jackson County, AL *Lydia Pennington*
- Knoxville, TN *Kim Bumpas*
- Loudon County, TN *Rodney Grugin*
- Meigs County, TN *Nadia Oliver*
- Paducah, KY *Jeff Canter and Steve Ervin*
- Perry County, TN *Amanda Mathenia*
- Roane County, TN *Stephanie Wright*
- South Pittsburg, TN *Walker Henley*
- Spring City, TN *Stephania Motes*
- The Shoals, AL *Carrie Crawford*





GUIDING PRINCIPLES

for North America's next great regional trail system

The following principles are embraced as a unifying yet flexible framework of ideas and values that will guide the future development of the Tennessee RiverLine across the dynamics of geography and time.

Resource Conservation and Stewardship
River Access, Visibility, and Awareness
Wildlife and Ecology
Identity and Culture
Safety, Recreation, and Health
Education and Interpretation

Social and Community Connections
Economic Development
Regionalism
Equity and Diversity
Engagement and Inclusivity
Design and Design Thinking

“First, and most importantly, the initiative has connected us to other river adjacent communities and enabled us to consider projects which would help us all leverage our proximity to the water. Secondly, the initiative allows our community to connect to others and learn what else we can do to prepare for a strong future, together. Finally, the initiative challenges us to think bigger and provides an infrastructure to act on those thoughts.”

- Suzanne Davidson, Assistant Director of Recreation, Paducah, KY

The sun sets over Flint Creek near the Tennessee River in Decatur, AL.

Tennessee RiverLine is an initiative of



with principal partners



for all who seek to experience the Tennessee River
for generations to come

RIVER ANIMATION

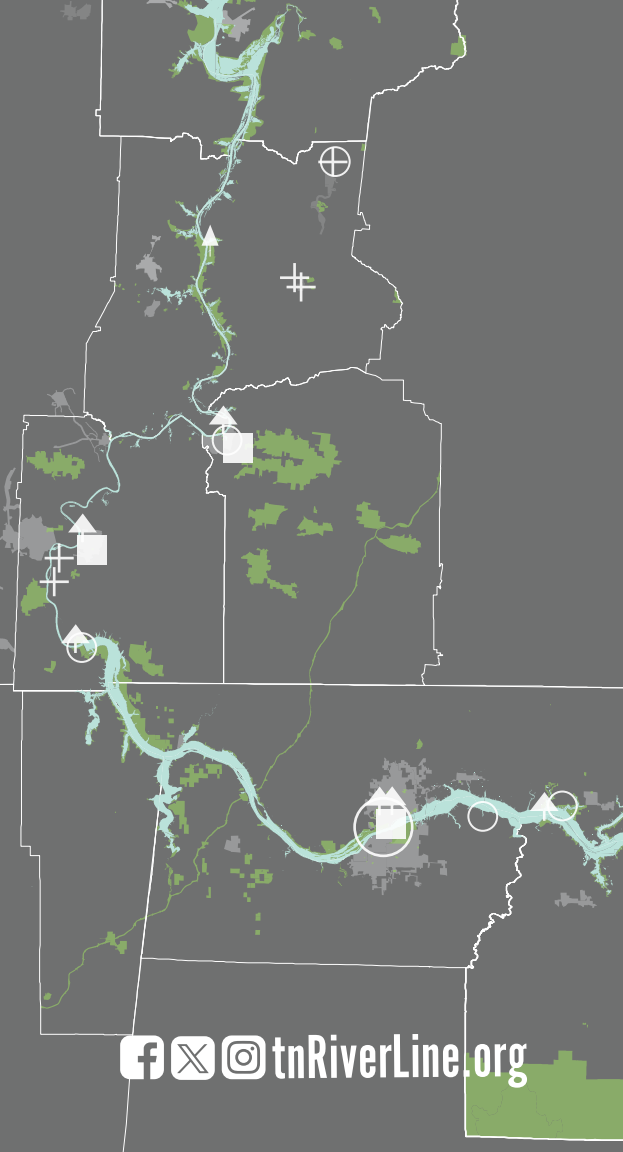
Throughout 2023, community partners collaborated with the Tennessee RiverLine to host over 100 events along the 652-miles of the Tennessee River. Read more about the impacts of these events in this report.

Not Pictured: Paducah, KY, Calvert City, KY, Stewart County, TN

○ 1-5 Events Occurred

○ 6+ Events Occurred

- CPI Community
- Outdoor Recreation
- ▲ Stewardship
- + TNRL Outreach



[tnRiverLine.org](https://www.tnRiverLine.org)